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153, 291, *hét* 155, 266, 268, 303, *behét* 418, *behét* 262, 292, 323, 420, *hete* 341, *behton* 437, *heoldon* 121, *misheoldon* 130, *leton* 180, *forleton* 156, *forlétton* 100, 372, *spéðw* 362.

In this connection it will not be inappropriate to call attention to some peculiar forms in the life of St. Chad, Anglia X, 141 ff.

Class I. *gewitu* 23, and also *onginnu* 1, and *bebeodu* 146, of classes III. and II. retain the old ending. Elsewhere *e* is regular in the first person of the singular.

Class II. *bræc* 243, for *bræc* from *brūcan*.

Classes III., V. *gefaþ* 174, is the only case of *a* for *ea* in the preterit singular. In class V *geseh* 213, for *geseah* 254, etc., occurs. In *bregdon* 175, preterit plural of *bregdan* the verb has gone over to class V where *e* for *æ* is here the rule. The final consonant in *gealt* 251, from *giældan* deserves notice. The strong *frignan* has become *fregnan* 39 (*fregn* 140, *fregnaden* 178,) and is weak.

Class IV. *bēr* 257 from *beran*, is the only case of accent in this form. Napier suggests that *genemað* 233 is an error of the scribe for *geneomað*, no uncommon form in Anglia and to be traced, though not with certainty till a later date, in Kent also. May not the forms which Bright attributes to *u*-umlaut (*hneoton*, *scionon*, *riodon*, *griopun*, *geweotan*, preterit plurals of I., Notes II. 160) have a similar origin? If they were due to *u*-umlaut would they not be more general and more frequent?

Class VI. The editor suggests that *slenne* 193, is a blunder for *sleane*. *Slæð* 194, is probably for *sleð*; *e* is here the usual umlaut of *æa*. *hlahendne* 255, shows no trace of the *-jan* form.

Reduplicating verbs show two peculiar forms, *gehælde* 57, for *gehēolde* and *onfongon* 136, for *-feng-*, cf. lines 23, 25, 55. The preterit of *hātan* is *heht* 50, 150. The shortened form, *het*, does not occur.

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# ON A VERSE IN THE OLD NORSE "HÖFUDLAUSN."

The Saga of Egil Skallagrímsson may with propriety be styled the skaldic Saga of Ice-

land: for its pages are strewn with short verses to the number of over fifty, and it contains, besides these, three long poems, of which the *Höfudlausn* is the first. The extreme difficulty of Icelandic poetry is caused mainly by the excessive use of obscure figures, and the *Höfudlausn* is no exception to this rule. The verse here selected for comment is the sixth, or rather the first half of it. The Icelandic reads as follows:

*hné firða fit  
við fleina hnit.*

This passage has been variously explained by different commentators. Jón Thorkelsson, in the Reykjavik edition of the Saga, 1856, page 256, offers the following explanation:

*Firða* (in Vigfusson's Dic. spelled only *fyrða*) from plural *firðar*, men, warriors [A. S. *fyrða*, troop].

*Fit*, a connected row. According to this, *fit* must be derived from *fitja*, to knit, or tie together. This meaning is not given by Vigfusson.

*Firða fit* would then mean, a connected row of men, battle-array. *Fleina hnit* he renders spear-thrusts.

In the *Lexikon Poeticum*, we find "*fit. f.*, planta pedis, *ταπόδος ποδός.*" Our passage from the *Höfudlausn* is quoted and the first part is explained as follows: "succubuit virorum pes, i. e., explicante G. Magnes, viri, pedibus succisis, cecederunt, aut pedibus amplius insistere non valentes prae lassitudine se dejecerunt."

Per Sörensson\* follows closely the rendering of the *Lexikon Poeticum*: *firðe*, as in the first: *fit*, foot, or knee; *fleina hnit* is translated spear-thrusts. *Hné* is, of course, the pret., 3d, sing, of *hníga*, to bend or recede, and can be translated in no other way.

The passage, then, according to the first explanation, reads in English:

The battle array receded before the spear-thrusts.

According to the second:

Men's feet (or knees) bent before the spear-thrusts.

It may be noted in this connection that *hníga*

\* "Egil Skallagrímssons Höfudlausn,—öfersatt och förklarad," Lund, 1868.

may be applied equally to the sinking or bending of almost any object, from the sun to a dying warrior or a tree (see Vigfusson's Dic., page 276). Hence, neither rendering does violence to the meaning of the verb.

*Hnit* is rendered, as we have already seen, by 'thrust.' Concerning this word, too, there is some difference of opinion. In Vigfusson we find *hnit* rendered as "forging; poet., the clash of battle," with a reference to our poem. In this connection it would be more properly rendered simply by 'clash,' or perhaps better by 'din.'

If *din* be accepted as the meaning of *hnit*, it would seem to follow almost as a necessity that *firða fit* be translated as battle-array, since to associate the bending of men's feet with the *din* of spears would form a very bold figure, founded on a very slight resemblance. With a modern poet this argument would certainly hold true, but in criticising Old Norse poetry we must not be governed at all by modern canons of art, remembering always that what would now be considered a blemish might in the tenth century have received unqualified approval. Again, if spear-*din* be regarded as a simple paraphrase for battle, the appropriateness of the figure becomes very much more apparent. (That *fleina hnit* may mean battle, cf. the following figures: "*vigelds-prym-rögnir*," *din* of swords or spears, battle. Egil. chap. 58, 1.; "*sverð-dynr*," sword-*din*, battle, Vigf.'s Dic., p. 610).

The *Lexikon Poeticum* renders *hnit* very much as Vigfusson does, but without explaining clearly the force of the figure employed; the result of the figure, not its working, is shown in the rendering: *collisio*, *conflictio*, *fleina hnit*, *spiculorum collisio*, *pugna*. From this we also derive additional authority for rendering *fleina hnit* battle. The Latin translation, contained in the A. M. edition of the Saga, Copenhagen, 1809, gives practically the same result as the above, namely:

Decidit virorum pes  
Ad hastarum collisionem.

In the face of these three authorities I should have no hesitation in accepting the rendering of *fit* by 'foot,' were it not for one circumstance. In stanza 4, the poet begins the description of Eirik's battles: he tells how "the *din* of

swords waxed hot against the rims of the shields; the battle waxed about the king." "The sword's river (blood) ran;" and in stanza 5, "the ship ran in blood; but the wound boiled." Stanza 6 is very short, consisting of only four lines, and to my mind it may be regarded as a climax to what has gone before. It presents a picture of the battle as a whole: the result of the preceding statements. Therefore it would seem more appropriate for the poet to employ the general word battle-array than the specific words men's feet or knees. Again, *fit* is singular, the nominative plur. being *fitjar*; but this is perhaps of minor importance. What is to be specially dwelt upon is the poetical appropriateness of the first rendering. This rendering of Thorkelsson's, further, does no violence to the derivation, since *fit* is frequently used metaphorically for a plain or meadow, that which is stretched out (see Vigfusson, p. 155, and *Lexikon Poeticum*, page 173), and we often observe figures in Old Norse poetry formed by a comparison between men and objects of nature, so that to apply the same word to a line of men and an extended meadow would be quite in accordance with the train of thought of the Icelandic skald (*hræs-lavar*, 'haystacks of the slain,' 'heaps of,' *Höfudlausn*, II., a striking resemblance to meadow of men, battle-array; a man is often called a tree, etc.).

The arguments in favor of Thorkelsson's rendering of *firðar fit* therefore are; first, the artistic appropriateness, and secondly, the analogy with other figures. The rendering of the verse would then be:

"The battle-array receded at the spear-*din* (battle)."

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